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ABSTRACT

The kinds of assistance needed by foreign college students in dealing with problems encountered during their college sojourn, as well as resources used in resolving those problems, were examined. Male (N=27) and female (N=17) students were interviewed during the spring quarter of 1977 on the University of Minnesota, Duluth, campus. Results indicated that: (1) personal and social needs are not being met adequately; (2) social isolation beteen American and foreign students is great; and (3) concern about grades, English, and program completion is high. (HLM)

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The Counseling Needs of Foreign Students

Ajit Das

Most universities and colleges in the United States have sizable populations of foreign students. Foreign students have been coming to the United States in increasingly large numbers since the end of World war II. According to statistics issued by the Institute of International Education, there were 178,850 foreign students attending institutions of higher education in the United States in 1975-76. These students were drawn from all over the world. The three largest contingents were from Iran (19,630), Hong Kong (11,764), and Nigeria (11,282).

For many of the foreign students the social and cultural environment of the host country is very different from the one that they come from. On arriving in this country, they encounter many problems of adjustment which require a series of complex learning on their part. The nature of these problems, their antecedents and consquences have been reported in the literature by a number of investigators (Deutch, 1970; Walton, 1967)

One set of problems that the foreign student encounters center around academic work, e.g., understanding the American educational system, planning what courses to take, difficulties with English, etc. Another group of problems stem from the social and personal life of the student, e.g., feeling homesick and lonely, difficulty in making friends, encountering racial or cultural discrimination, lack of proper living arrangements, financial difficulties etc.

Most colleges and universities that have appreciable number of foreign students have developed some administrative machinery to provide orientation, advisement and counseling for them. The extent to which such assistance is utilized by the foreign students and its effectiveness

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has not received as much attention from the researchers as the problems encountered by the foreign students.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the current study was to determine the kinds of assistance that foreign students need in dealing with the problems that they encounter, upon arrival and later on in their sojourn, the sources from which they obtain such assistance and the perceived adequacy of such assistance.

Methodology: A sample (N=44) of foreign students attending the University of Minnesota, Duluth, in 1976-77 was surveyed. The students came from the following parts of the world: Far East including Hong Kong (20), South Asia (6), Middle East (6), Africa (6) and Latin America (4). The sample constituted 50 percent of the total number of students from these regions of the world attending the University of Minnesota, Duluth. There were 27 males and 17 females.

Data was collected during the Spring Quarter, 1977, through personal interviews, using an interview schedule. Interviews lasted from 30 to 45 minutes. The data was coded and analyzed by means of a computer program to yield frequency distrubutions and some cross tabulations.

Findings: Almost 90 percent of the foreign students interviewed reported that upon arrival they needed help with housing, registration and program planning. For the majority of students (73 percent), help in these areas was provided by the student personnel staff of the college, and was perceived as fairly adequate. The other 27 percent depended on friends and family for this kind of help.

An understanding of how the American educational system worked was acquired by most students by their own efforts with some informal help from fellow students. Sixty-six percent of the students reported that

they acquired a working knowledge of the system within a quarter.

Once these initial problems were solved, concerns about grades, completion of one's program or transferring to another program, emerged. 75 percent of the students expressed such concerns; another 11 percent reported they were concerned about their English; only 14 percent stated that they had no concerns regarding studies. With the exception of English language competence (for which help was provided by school), these concerns were typically handled by the students themselves with little or no help from student personnel staff.

About 66 percent of the students stated that they needed financial assistance. The majority of them worked on campus jobs which many of them had landed with their own efforts. Only 7 percent reported that they had encountered job discrimination.

In the sphere of personal and social life, the most common problems (reported by 31 percent) were a sense of social isolation and feelings of loneliness and homesickness, often accentuated during holidays. 23 percent of the students reported that they had personally very little social contact with American students. As many as 82 percent believed that there was little social contact between foreign students and American students.

Reasons given by students to explain this state of affairs included cultural barriers, lack of interest on the part of American students, preoccupation of both American and foreign students with studies, and lack of culturally appropriate social skills on the part of some foreign students. Forty-seven percent of the foreign students reported that most of their close friends were Americans. Almost all of the foreign students

said that they would welcome more social contact with American students.

Contacts between foreign students and people in the community were even less common. Fifty percent of the foreign students said that they had met less than three persons in the community; 22 percent said they had met none.

Cross tabulation of the data showed systematic differences among students from different regions on two variables. In the first place as shown in Table 1 students from different parts of the world expressed different concerns regarding their studies. Students from the Far East were more concerned about their English; students from Africa and Latin America about their grades; and student from South Asia about transferring to degree granting programs.

Secondly, as shown in Table 2 students from different parts of the world differed in regard to difficulty encountered in making friends. Students from the Far East, South Asia and Africa reported difficulty in making friends more often than students from the Middle East and Latin America.

Conclusions: The following conclusions were drawn from this investigation:

1. The personal and social needs of many foreign students on this campus are being inadequately met. Foreign students generally feel socially isolated and desire more informal social contact with American students.
2. There is very little social contact between foreign students and people in the community. This further heightens the sense of social isolation on the part of the foreign student.
3. The social isolation of the foreign student diminishes the value of

Table 1

Concerns Regarding Studies

Region	Grades	Transfer	English	Finish up	No problem
Far East	1	3	4	1	1
Hong Kong	7	1	0	0	2
South Asia	0	5	0	1	0
Mid East	2	1	0	1	0
Africa	5	0	0	2	1
Latin America	2	0	1	1	0

2= 39.24, d.f.= 20 p.01 Crammer's V=.47

Table 2

Difficulty in Making Friends

Region	Yes	No
Far East	8	2
Hong Kong	7	3
South Asia	5	1
Mid East	0	6
Africa	6	2
Latin America	2	2

2= 13.6, d.f.=5 p .01 Crammer's V=.55

his sojourn in a different culture; it also deprives the American student of a potentially valuable experience, and the local community of an educational resource.

4. It is incumbent on student personnel staff, especially counselors, to develop imaginative programs to integrate the foreign student in the social life of the college and the community.

Some Proposed Solutions:

Student personnel workers on this campus and elsewhere have developed a number of programs to mitigate the social isolation of the foreign student. Programs which result in brief, episodic contacts between foreign students and others, such as receptions, arranged hospitality, fairs etc. seem to have limited value. Contacts made at such events, are rarely followed up by either the hosts or by the guests. Programs that lead to longer interaction between foreign students and others, such as, host families, accomplish better results. The host family "adopts" a foreign student for a year or so and provides him or her with a home away from home. The student does not necessarily live with the family, but has a standing invitation to visit informally. Another program that was introduced recently on this campus, and has worked rather well, is called the "study-buddy" program. Foreign students who need help with their English or study skills are teamed up with an American student who is willing and able to help. These arrangements usually lead to mutually satisfying interpersonal relationships, besides achieving their more specific objective. Another relatively new and virtually untried idea is to involve foreign students in various facets of the educational experience of American students. There are many possiblitities

here. Mestenhauser (1975) has suggested the following areas in which foreign students can contribute to the education of American students:

1. study of socialization and leadership
2. country and area studies
3. cross cultural learning-international dimensions of social sciences and other fields such as communications (speech and journalism) foreign languages, humanities, linguistics literature and comprehensive literature etc.
4. cross cultural communication
5. study of national and international conflicts
6. cross cultural dimensions of education
7. cross cultural perspectives on development and underdevelopment

The learning process, according to Mesthauser, may involve any of the following modalities:

1. one to one learning involving the interview method
2. traditional method of learning (seminar, pro seminar, discussion groups, team or group assignments)
3. experiental learning for more mature students under the supervision of people who are actively involved in study of international intercultural programs.

The more mature and qualified foreign students can make valuable contribution to the educational experience of American students in any of the areas mentioned above. It is incumbent on faculty and student personnel workers to devise effective ways of utilizing this potential educational resource. In doing so they will be extending the educational horizon of the American students and providing a useful and self-enhancing role to the foreign students during their stay in this country. Closer contact under these conditions is also likely to promote better understanding of each other which is a paramount goal of international and intercultural education.

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